



**radical
democracy**



**interview:
david ian robin
millennials for bernie
millennials for revolution**



David Olson interviews David Robin for Radical Democracy

David Ian Robin was involved in Occupy Wall Street, and is a cofounder of Facebook group Millennials for Bernie Sanders, which mobilized support for Senator Sanders' presidential campaign during the 2016 Democratic Primary.

That group has now become Millennials for Revolution, a group committed to informing and organizing millennials for “fundamental change, not just a change of faces at the top of the political pyramid.”



Radical Democracy: Could you talk a little bit about how you got involved in the social justice movement?

David Robin: I went to the New School, and got a Master's degree in sociology. I learned a lot about past movements, and the sociology of social movements.

When I graduated, I was over a hundred-and-thirty thousand dollars in student debt. That would radicalize someone, you know?

I graduated in May 2011, had a few odd jobs, then Occupy happened in September 2011. That was my first experience as an activist, on the ground. On September 17, 2011, a friend and I decided to check it out.

David Robin Interview con't

That was day one of **Occupy Wall Street**. We had no idea it would explode, all over the country and all over the world. But I went that day, and it **changed my life**.

Since I was involved with Occupy, I've marched with Fight for \$15. I've marched with Black Lives Matter. But with Millennials for Bernie Sanders, and now Millennials for Revolution, this is definitely the most involved I've been.

RD: Can you talk about that shift from supporting the Sanders campaign to a more broadly based movement?

DR: Once Bernie's campaign was over, the worry was that the group would split up, because people's energy wasn't focused on a single issue or cause, they were scattered among all these different causes—student debt, racism, climate change, et cetera. We were united because Bernie supported all of these issues.

The fact that we have incorporated these causes into demands, the fact that we have something to rally behind, is very important. We can even use this electorally, like a litmus test. We can use that to hold power accountable, while also pushing until we become the ones in power. That's the ultimate goal, and it's going to happen.

David Robin Interview cont

The big issue is that people vote every four years, and they say, that's it, we elected a president. Now we can go about our lives and not pay attention for a while. And, clearly that way just doesn't work anymore. We have to get people involved with local elections, getting progressive candidates into office on the ground level, but more importantly we have to get people in the streets for a cause, rather than for a candidate.

RD: The Women's March in Washington was organized shortly after the election, to protest Trump's election. But M4R started organizing for a March on that same date before the election. How did Trump's election change the focus of the March, and the focus of the movement in general?

DR: Our message was that no matter who wins, the next day we're going to be out on the street. The Trump presidency is a huge, very real threat. We already have an increase in hate crimes, because of his anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-people of color, anti-LGBT agenda. And then you have his cabinet, whose goal is to privatize public services, including education, plus the stripping away of Medicare, Obamacare, Social Security, environmental regulations, and financial regulations. The threat is very, very large.

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David Robin Interview cont

After the election, I was pretty shocked and unsure what was going to happen next. I feel like **Trump represents everything that's wrong with America right now—he's all our targets, all in one.** My hope is that this will be what finally wakes people up, and makes people realize that they have to do more than just sign petitions. I don't think it's real for people yet. I think once he's actually in office, he'll immediately announce executive orders that are going to be very bad, and do damage, right away. My hope is that different groups will come together in a huge coalition to oppose Trump and his entire administration.

RD: If there is any sort of silver lining here, it's that more folks are ready to take action. Hopefully we're at a tipping point for people jumping into this "Movement of movements," and getting active, immediately.

DR: I have friends who have never been to a protest before, who are now like, yeah, we're going to march. That's encouraging to me. I'm hoping that people who haven't been involved in Occupy, or Fight for \$15, or Black Lives Matter, the environmental movement—maybe this will be their introduction. Before, the corruption wasn't really hidden, but people weren't paying attention to it. Now with Trump it's hard to ignore.

David Robin Interview cont

RD: With so much focus on resisting Trump, is there a danger of movement energy getting sucked away from the bigger fight of transformational change?

DR: The movement against Trump also has to be against neoliberalism. For instance, the Obama administration deported a record number of undocumented immigrants, and no one talks about that. **Neoliberalism already is affecting the environment, already is affecting black and brown people, already not doing enough to rein in Wall Street.** Neoliberalism led to the situation we're at now, headed for a Trump presidency. I think a resistance movement has to be against both coming fascism and neoliberalism. Really, Trump is a neoliberal also. His cabinet wants to privatize all these public services, for example.

RD: Earlier you mentioned that M4R has published an agenda, or list of demands. Could you talk about that a bit?

DR: We have a set of demands which includes ending systemic racism, fighting for fifteen-dollars-an-hour minimum wage, banning fracking, assisting switching to renewable energy, a Robin Hood tax on Wall Street, raising taxes on the one percent, rejecting the TPP, and medicare for all. We want people all across the country to

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march on January 21 for these demands, but even more than that, we want them to continue to engage. **Our goal is to build a mass movement of young people to push for change both at the polls and in the streets.** I think with that sustained pressure, we can make a transition from campaign to movement, and build something that could really affect the power structure. That's the goal.

RD: A list of goals or demands seems like a major shift—similar to the Movement for Black Lives putting out their platform, A Vision for Black Lives. How important is that step for the movement?

DR: I think it's extremely important. It's important for both the members of the movement, as well as the media, who are watching us. Not having any demands was a big criticism of Occupy from the media— even though there was the Declaration of the Occupation of New York City, the media didn't really pick up on that. We want to avoid the media being able to dismiss us.

After Occupy, there was a lull for a little bit. People were worried that Occupy was dead, and then all these other movements came, they just sprouted up from it. It's the same now with Bernie's campaign over. Everyone's like, "what do we do now?" I think something even larger and more powerful is going to come from it, and it's going to challenge the system in a very direct way.

David Robin Interview cont

RD: Yes, so many groups and projects came out of the Occupy movement. Radical Democracy came out of Occupy, in fact, when I met Alan Haber, the founder of SDS, at an Occupy Ann Arbor general assembly. We started talking about the Port Huron Statement, and how it connected to Occupy...

DR: Really? Cool.

RD: Yeah, Occupy really set the stage for this wave of the movement, I think, and then the amazing eruption of Black Lives Matter. Bernie's campaign seems to have created some confidence on the Left, and got the media attention. There's so much energy on the Left at them moment, despite Trump's election.

DR: Occupy, Black Lives Matter, Fight for \$15, Bernie's movement, the climate movement. From 2011 to now, these movements just kept getting larger and larger. They've really exploded.

Millennials are the largest voting block right now, and as the years pass, we're only going to become more powerful. But we have to make sure that our movement is the one that succeeds—because the right-wing has their own populist movement, and Trump has a very passionate base. I feel like it's a battle between the Trump movement and the Bernie movement, a battle for the future. We want to make sure that the future is a progressive one, and not a fascist one, basically.

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David Robin Interview cont

RD: I think there's a pragmatism on the Left now, about needing to get better representation within the system without rejecting the power of having people in the street.

DR: If we have a movement that every day is disrupting the system, that is very effective. It will help bring change. But if you're not voting, if you're not involved in electoral politics, then the candidates will still be the same neoliberal candidates, and that makes it harder to change the system. So you need both. A diversity of tactics—although maybe not in the traditional sense.

RD: I think that's healthy for a movement: not insisting on limited ways of getting things done, of forcing or creating change.

DR: We're not looking for people just to march, or just to rally. If you want to block a highway, if you want to organize a march that blocks infrastructure and really gets the message out there, saying millennials are sick and tired of this, and **we're going to shut shit down**, that's a strong message. So yeah, they're interconnected, and they're both necessary.

RD: On the M4R Facebook, you say that you're not looking for personnel or policy changes, but fundamental, systemic change—basically the definition for "radical" change we use for the RD Project.

David Robin Interview cont

What gives you hope that this generation can bring about fundamental or radical change?

DR: That's a good question, because it's a huge uphill climb. **We're waging a fight with some of the most powerful forces on the planet.** They produce everything we consume. They own the media. They own all the major conglomerates, and they own all the political power, too. So it is hard. It's very hard. But so much energy came through Bernie's campaign. It seemed from the beginning to be lot more than a political campaign for president, especially with millennials. We noticed that people were really receptive to a lot more radical messaging.

RD: Why do you think that is?

DR: We're a generation in debt—many of us have hundreds of thousands of dollars in student loan debts. We see that climate change is getting more and more serious, and it affects us the most. Our kids, our grandkids, they're going to be the ones who'll have to deal with these problems the most, but we'll still be alive. In Black Lives Matter, you see a lot of millennials on the front lines. All these movements, these issues, are interconnected. I feel like these are all millennial-led movements. I feel the change starts with our generation.

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David Robin Interview cont

In one of the Wikileaks emails, Hillary's campaign realized millennials aren't going to buy all that BS political talk. We're going to see right through it. They realized that from an early stage, but they didn't really do much to address it. I don't think her message resonated with millennials, and it still doesn't.

Millennials see through a lot of the political talk and chaos and see the way the system works. I think that's why our generation has a unique ability to push for that change, but it's going to take a lot of time and work. Like I said, these are the strongest forces on the planet. But we just have to keep marching, keep fighting. And we are making progress.

RD: Also, social media just makes it possible to organize much more quickly, it's unbelievable. That's a major change, a major improvement from past movements.

DR: It's also why the movement is so horizontal. It's also very flexible, so it can attack power from a lot of different points.

People still argue about whether social media is actually fueling activism. I think it definitely is, one hundred percent. You see the power of it in every movement right now. And I think the potential of social media to become even more powerful is there.

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David Robin Interview cont

RD: Agreed. The Bernie campaign really showed that social networks can translate into tangible things: raising serious cash for a candidate, as well as thirteen million votes in the primary. A guy saying he's a democratic socialist got thirteen million votes—that should scare the shit out of the establishment. They're trying to shrug it off, but on some level, they know. They realize there's something going on that they don't quite get. There's a source of power that they don't really control. It's us. It's people organizing.

DR: Yes, and he won what? Twenty-two, twenty-three states? That's huge. It's funny looking back at articles from late 2015 and seeing 538.com say Bernie *might* win New Hampshire and lose everywhere else. They predicted he likely wouldn't win a single state.

Bernie was never supposed to get this far. They were coordinating against him from day one—you can see it in the Wikileaks emails. And they were in collusion with the media. And despite all of that, he still almost won. He still got all the way to the convention.

RD: It started out as a political campaign, but after what the DNC did to them, to Bernie, I think a lot of folks realize we need more than just an inside game...

David Robin Interview cont

DR: **We really need to get people to abandon the "every four years" thinking—we need to do much more than vote.**

This country isn't going to change just because you elect Hillary, or if the House is Democratic or Republican. That's not going to change the system.

People need to realize the strength that they have collectively, and also by themselves. We have to, because there's so much urgency. If we don't, who else is going to step up?

I say this is our moment.

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